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PHI DELTA SEPTEMBER 1991

KAPPAN

Phi Delta September 1991 • Volume 73 • Number 1

KAPPAN

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PHI DELTA KAPPAN USPS 429-840

(ISSN 0031-7217) Published monthly, except July and August, by Phi Delta Kappa, Inc., Eighth & Union, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402. Subscription rate, $30 per year, domestic; $32.50 per year, foreign. Single copies $3.50 each; remit with order. Indexed in *Education Index* and in *Current Index to Journals in Education*; available on microfilm, University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Mich. Second-class postage paid at Bloomington, Ind., and at an additional mailing office. *Postmaster:* Send address changes to *Phi Delta Kappan*, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402. Copyright 1991 by Phi Delta Kappa, Inc.

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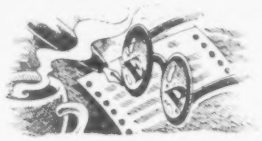
The *Phi Delta Kappan* publishes articles concerned with educational research, service, and leadership; issues, trends, and policy are emphasized. Views expressed do not necessarily agree with positions taken by Phi Delta Kappa, the professional fraternity in education.

THE EDITOR'S PAGE



Signs of Hope

THE LIFE prospects for many American children are grim, and educators can't fix the situation by themselves. That's not news to most of you, but no one has painted the gloomy picture in clearer strokes than Harold Hodgkinson, whose article on "education's leaky roof" opens this new volume of the *Kappan*.

Hodgkinson points out that "one-third of preschool children are destined for school failure because of poverty, neglect, sickness, handicapping conditions, and lack of adult protection and nurturance." The roots of the problem run deep. They spring from national self-indulgence, misplaced priorities, and a failure to view children as the human capital on which our collective future depends.

We need to invest in our children to save ourselves. It's as simple as that. And at last there are glimmerings of hope that the nation is coming around to this point of view.

In late June the bipartisan National Commission on Children unanimously approved a $1,000-per-child refundable tax credit (to replace the current tax exemption for dependents), as well as a program to force absent parents to pay child support (with a system of federal "insurance" to take up the slack when the absent parents don't pay or when their payments fail to meet certain minimums). If implemented, both proposals would help all parents, but especially those with low incomes.

Meanwhile, the National Education Goals Panel has announced the indicators it will use in assessing progress toward achievement of the six goals set in early 1990 by President Bush and the governors. For the first goal – "by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" – the panel will look at such things as the proportion of low-birthweight babies, the level of maternal prenatal health care, the level of pediatric health care, children's nutritional status, the extent of their participation in preschool programs, and the quality of those programs. If what gets measured gets attended to, these indicators are hopeful signs.

Clearly, effective action on these fronts will be costly. However, economist Sylvia Hewlett, in her compelling new book *When the Bough Breaks: The Cost of Neglecting Our Children* (Basic Books, 1991), makes one thing abundantly clear: neglecting children is also costly, and compassion is cheaper in the long run than callousness. Prevention and early intervention are cost-effective. (If you doubt that statement, compare their price tags to the costs of incarceration.)

One call for action on behalf of our children has been issued by William Davis and Edward McCaul, authors of *The Emerging Crisis: Current and Projected Status of Children in the United States*, a monograph of the Institute for the Study of At-Risk Students at the University of Maine. "We know which factors and conditions cause the cycles of social, economic, and educational disadvantage in our nation to continue," Davis and McCaul point out – and we possess "the knowledge and the technology to address this crisis." The only thing we still seem to lack, Davis and McCaul suggest, is the national will. But momentum and will seem to be building.

Perhaps what's needed to push us over the top is a public relations campaign in support of American children, modeled on the one designed to support U.S. troops during Desert Storm. Perhaps we ought to be tying green ribbons on every mailbox, utility pole, and good-sized tree – green, signifying hope that this nation will somehow find the resources to make the necessary investment in its most vulnerable citizens, whose well-being is absolutely central to the economic and moral well-being of us all. – PBG

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REFORM

Reform Versus Reality

With regard to the problems of children in America, President Bush has said, "We have more will than wallet." Mr. Hodgkinson thinks the President has it backward.

By Harold Hodgkinson

TO BEGIN, think of the following analogy. American education is like a house. This house was beautiful and well maintained, one of the nicest houses in the world. But over time, the owners allowed the house to deteriorate. First, a leak in the roof developed, allowing water to enter the attic, then to trickle down to the second floor, and then to the main floor. Floors buckled, plaster fell from the walls, electric systems rusted, windows began to fall out. The owners, returning after a long absence, hastily repaired the windows, the plaster, and the electric motors – but they neglected to fix the roof. The owners were surprised and angry when, after all their efforts, the house continued to deteriorate.

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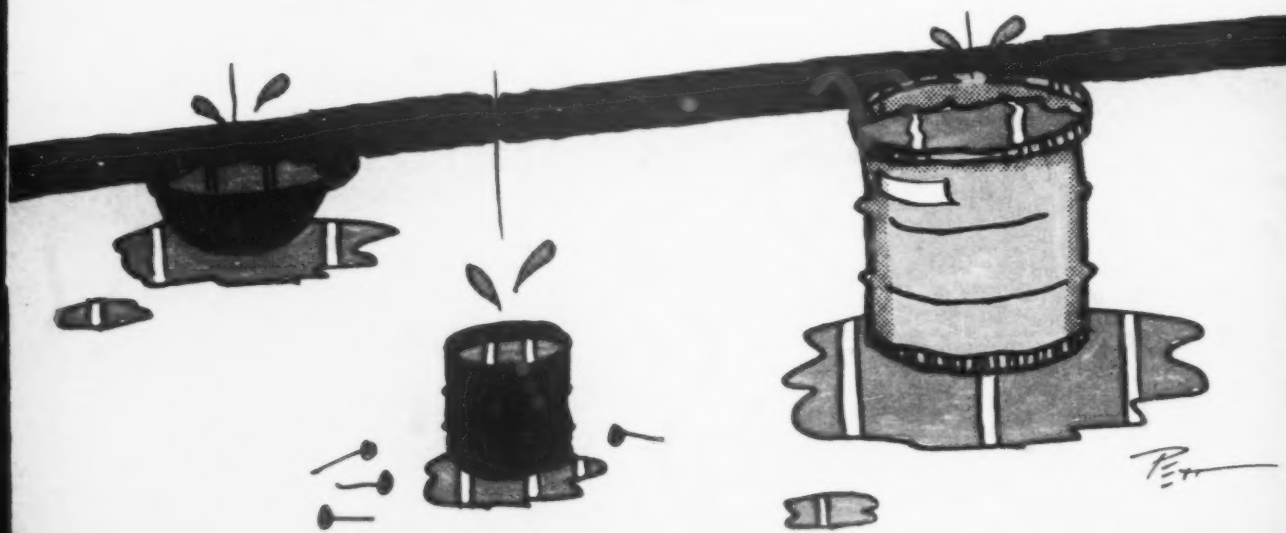


Illustration by Joel Pett

Basically, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* marked the return of the owners after a long absence to find education's house badly deteriorated. The first major sign of deterioration was declining scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), which Americans often hold to be *the* single barometer of educational quality. Since that time, a blizzard of education reform proposals has fallen, and states have raised the graduation standards for high schools, installed minimum standards for moving from one grade to the next, required new teachers to pass special examinations before being allowed to teach, instituted choice and magnet school programs, and so on.

But so far, there has been no change in high school graduation rates, in most test scores, or in other indicators of "quality." After nearly a decade, we have fixed the plaster in education's house, installed new windows, and repaired the electric motors. *But the roof still leaks.* Until we fix the roof, the house continues to deteriorate.

The leaky roof in our educational house is a metaphor for the spectacular changes that have occurred in the nature of the children who come to school. Until we pay attention to these changes, our tinkering with the rest of the house will continue to produce no important results. The fact is that at least one-third of the nation's children are at risk of school failure even before they enter kindergarten. The schools did not cause these deficits, and neither did the youngsters. A few examples may suffice:

- Since 1987, one-fourth of all preschool children in the U.S. have been in poverty.
- Every year, about 350,000 children are born to mothers who were addicted to cocaine during pregnancy. Those who survive birth become children with strikingly short attention spans, poor coordination, and much worse. Of course, the schools will have to teach these children, and getting such children ready for kindergarten costs around $40,000 each – about the same as for children with fetal alcohol syndrome.
- Today, 15 million children are being reared by single mothers, whose family income averages about $11,400 in 1988 dollars (within $1,000 of the poverty line). The average family income for a married couple with children is slightly over $34,000 a year.
- Twenty percent of America's preschool children have not been vaccinated against polio.
- The "Norman Rockwell" family – a working father, a housewife mother, and two children of school age – constitutes only 6% of U.S. households today.
- One-fourth of pregnant mothers receive no physical care of any sort during the crucial first trimester of pregnancy. About 20% of handicapped children would not be impaired had their mothers had one physical exam during the first trimester, which could have detected potential problems.
- At least two million school-age children have no adult supervision at all after school. Two million more are being reared by *neither* parent.
- On any given night, between 50,000 and 200,000 children have no home. (In 1988, 40% of shelter users were families with children.)
- In 1987, child protection agencies received 2.2 million reports of child abuse or neglect – triple the number received in 1976.

The leaky roof is a metaphor for the spectacular changes that have occurred in the nature of the children who come to school.

This is the nature of education's leaky roof: about one-third of preschool children are destined for school failure because of poverty, neglect, sickness, handicapping conditions, and lack of adult protection and nurturance. There is no point in trying to teach hungry or sick children. From this we can deduce one of the most important points in our attempts to deal with education: *educators can't fix the roof all by themselves.* It will require the efforts of many people and organizations – health and social welfare agencies, parents, business and political leaders – to even begin to repair this leaky roof. There is no time to waste in fixing blame; we need to act to fix the roof. And unless we start, the house will continue to deteriorate, and all Americans will pay the price.

Indeed, the first of the national goals for education outlined by the President and the nation's governors states that, "by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn." Three of the objectives attached to this goal read as follows:

- All disadvantaged and disabled children will have access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare children for school.
- Every parent in America will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping his or her preschool child to learn; parents will have access to the training and support they need.
- Children will receive the nutrition and health care needed to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies, and the number of low-birthweight babies will be significantly reduced through enhanced prenatal health systems.

While these are noble statements about the need to fix the roof, they are not at all informative on how this should be done. (It has been estimated that meeting just the first objective would cost $30 billion to implement.) We need to know more about *why* the roof is leaking – why so many of our children are at risk of failure in school and in life.

The fact is that more than one-third of American children have the deck stacked against them long before they enter school. Although America's best students are on a par with the world's best, ours is undoubtedly the worst "bottom third" of any of the industrialized democracies. We need to take a brief look at the kinds of changes that have brought about this concentration of children at risk.

CHANGES IN THE FAMILY

During the 1980s the American family continued to undergo major changes in its structure (see Table 1). Every kind of "atypical" family increased in number during the decade, while the "typical" family – married couple with children – actually declined in number. Today, almost 50% of America's young people will spend some years before they reach age 18 being raised by a single parent. In 1988, 4.3 million children were living with a mother who had never married (up 678% since 1970). Few have studied the consequences of being a child of an unmarried mother, but it's hard to think of this situation as an advantage. The 15 million children being raised by single mothers will have about one-third as much to spend on their needs as children being raised by two parents. (When both parents work, family income does not double; it *triples*.) For young children raised by a single mother, day care becomes a *vital educational issue*, as well as a matter of family survival. The 2.5 million fathers raising children by themselves have also discovered the vital nature of day care.

TABLE 1.
U.S. Households, 1980-90

	1980	1990	% Change
All households	80,467,000	93,920,000	+16.7
Family households	59,190,000	66,652,000	+12.4
Married couples	48,990,000	52,837,000	+ 7.9
Married without children	24,210,000	28,315,000	+17.0
Married with children	24,780,000	24,522,000	– 1.0
Single female head	8,205,000	11,130,000	+35.6
Single male head	1,995,000	2,575,000	+29.1
People living alone	18,202,000	22,879,000	+25.7
Living with nonrelatives	3,075,000	4,500,000	+46.3

Some things show up clearly in these numbers. First, only about a quarter of America's households have a child in the public schools, a fact that will make school bond elections more difficult to pull off as time goes by. Second, 25 million people live by themselves or with nonrelatives, which explains why America's fertility rates are so low! Third, the feminization of poverty is not just a slogan: 23% of America's smallest children (birth to age 5) live in poverty, the highest rate of any industrialized nation. And many of them have a single parent, often a mother who works at a low-income service job. At present about six million workers in the U.S. earn the minimum wage, and more than five million others are within 50 cents of the minimum wage. Females over 25 with children to support – not teenage males saving for a car – account for the largest proportion of these low-wage workers. These women desperately need job skills to support their children, but they are not well represented in programs supported by the Job Training and Partnership Act or in other training programs.

We can begin to see how these areas interrelate when we think of a single mother with a low income who is raising a child. She must have a place to live; yet there are eight million qualified low-income households trying to play musical chairs with only four million low-income housing units. (Literally no one is building new low-income housing units in the U.S.) She will pay a higher percentage – in some cases more than 50% – of her income for housing than any other category of worker. It is highly unlikely that her living unit will have a quiet place for a child to study.

In addition, this woman must get to work, often on public transportation if she can't afford a car. If her child is a preschooler, she will have to get the child to day care before she gets herself to work, an arrangement that may involve four or more bus trips at the end of each day. (For women in this situation, day-care centers, housing, and jobs are not usually located close to one another.) If the child gets ill, the logistics get even more complex. A missed bus or a conked-out car can mean that the rent cannot be paid. Then the salary check may be changed for a welfare check, a switch that is painful not only to her and her child, but also to the taxpayer who must pay for the switch! (It would be much cheaper for us to prevent her from going into poverty than to pay for the very expensive consequences, including her child being in poverty and the loss of her self-esteem.)

If the President and the nation's governors are serious about the first objective associated with the first national goal, we must deal with this single parent and her child. For this woman and her child (let's call him Carlos), education services, health services, day-care services, transportation services, housing services, and employment services must all function together to prevent Carlos from having a diminished future. Carlos *is* education's leaky roof!

There is no way that the education system alone can be responsible for the economic difficulties of this woman and her son, although educators will have to teach the person who is at the end of the service chain: Carlos. In order for the national goals to be achieved, our leaders will have to think of a way for Carlos and his mother to have an improved base of services so that Carlos will not become a liability to the taxpayer and the nation. This may seem difficult, but Carlos' problems are much easier to solve than those of the 350,000 cocaine-addicted babies born every year. The national

"I thought there was supposed to be safety in numbers."

goals are silent about such children, although they are already showing up in the schools.

CHANGES IN ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION

One of the good things about the 1990 Census is that we already know many of the most important numbers. For example, the American population grew by 10% between 1980 and 1990, reaching a new total of 249.8 million, an addition of 23 million people. The fastest growing groups are the eldest members of our population: 57,000 Americans are at least 100 years old, according to the 1990 Census, up from 32,000 in 1980. Minority populations also grew rapidly.

Ninety percent of the 23-million-person increase occurred in the South and West, although some eastern states, such as New York and New Jersey, have started growing again. Only *three* states account for almost half of the nation's growth: Texas, Florida, and California increased their populations by a total of 11.7 million. We can link this growth to some political changes if we look at the increased votes in the House of Representatives by the year 2000.

It is very clear that the states with the most population growth (and the most new political clout) are states with a great deal of ethnic diversity. Table 2 shows the increases in population for various ethnic groups between 1980 and 1990.

While the white population increased by 15 million, the nonwhite population increased by 14 million. Even though whites grew by 8%, their share of the total U.S. population declined from 86% to 84%.

The numbers get even more interesting when we project changes in the youth population from 1990 to 2010 (see Figure 1). During those two decades, the nation will gain in total population, but America's youth population will decline rapidly after 2000, because of the decline in women entering the childbearing years. However, as the total youth cohort moves from 64 million to 65 million, then down to 62 million, the nonwhite component of the nation's youth cohort will increase dramatically, from 30% in 1990 to 38% in 2010. Note also that the white youth population declines during *both* decades. In fact, in 2010, 12 states and the District of Columbia will contain 30 million of our 62 million young people, with the percentages of minority youths as follows: Washington, D.C., 93.2%; Hawaii, 79.5%; New Mexico, 76.5%; Texas, 56.9%; California, 56.9%; Florida, 53.4%; New York, 52.8%; Louisiana, 50.3%; Mississippi, 49.9%; New Jersey, 45.7%; Maryland, 42.7%; Illinois, 41.7%; South Carolina, 40.1%; U.S. total, 38.7%.

Many of these are large states, with a good deal of political and economic clout. But in all of them, a new question will arise: What do we call "minorities" when they constitute a majority? It behooves us all to make sure that *every* child in America has a good education and access to a good job. We cannot, as a nation, afford to throw *any* child away; we need them all to become successful adults if the economy, the community, the work force, the military – indeed, the nation – are to thrive. (And who else will generate the incomes that will pay for the Social Security benefits of the readers of this article?) Of the 20 million new workers who will be added to the American economy by 2000, only 18% of the net additions will be white males born in the U.S. The rest will be a combination of women, immigrants, or minorities.

By the 1980s the equity efforts of the 1960s had begun to pay off in terms of minority populations entering the middle class (defined by college education, suburban living options, and a white-collar or professional job). About 40% of the black population can be called mid-

TABLE 2.
Population Increases (in Millions) by Ethnic Group, 1980-90

	1980 Total	1990 Total	% Increase
White	194.7	210.3	8
Black	26.7	31.0	16
Asian, other	5.2	8.6	65
Hispanic	14.6	21.0	44

FIGURE 1.
U.S. Youth (Birth-18) by Race, 1990-2010

Source: *American Demographics*, May 1989, p. 37.

dle class in 1990; Hispanics are not far behind, and Asians are actually ahead. Different places in America have produced very different rates of black suburbanization, as the following list makes clear: Miami, 69%; Newark, 52.9%; Washington, D.C., 48.5%; Los Angeles, 46.5%; Atlanta, 46%; Oakland, 39.5%; St. Louis, 35.4%; Birmingham, 34.1%; Philadelphia, 27.7%; Cleveland, 27.2%; New Orleans, 24.6%; Baltimore, 23.5%; Memphis, 15.4%; Dallas, 15.3%; Detroit, 14.9%; Houston, 14%; and Chicago, 9%.

As jobs follow people to the suburbs, the ability of a city to allow either suburbanization or the development of middle-income homes and jobs within the city limits (the latter, known as "gentrification," has been a major failure in America) will have a large effect on the ability of the metropolitan area – city plus suburbs – to be economically healthy.

With money, jobs, houses, and (to some extent) brains and aspirations having moved to the suburbs, serious questions must be raised about our most serious problem: America's inner-city schools, where the highest percentage of "at-risk" students can be found; where classes are large (even though these children need the *most* individual attention); where health care, housing, transportation, personal security, and community stability are inadequate; where it is *very* hard to recruit and retain high-quality teachers and administrators; and where racial segregation still exists to an appalling degree, despite our best efforts. (It is pointless to desegregate schools if housing and jobs remain segregated.) The national education goals are conspicuous in their neglect of the special problems of inner-city schools in America.

It is particularly frustrating to realize that, if you equalize the environment in which a minority person lives (a home in the suburbs, parents who are college graduates and have managerial or professional jobs), you will tend to equalize his or her educational achievement as well. Indeed, for people of similar social and economic background, race *tends to go away as a predictor of educational achievement*. Figure 2 shows clearly that children of wealthy black families do *better* at math than do children of poor Asian families.

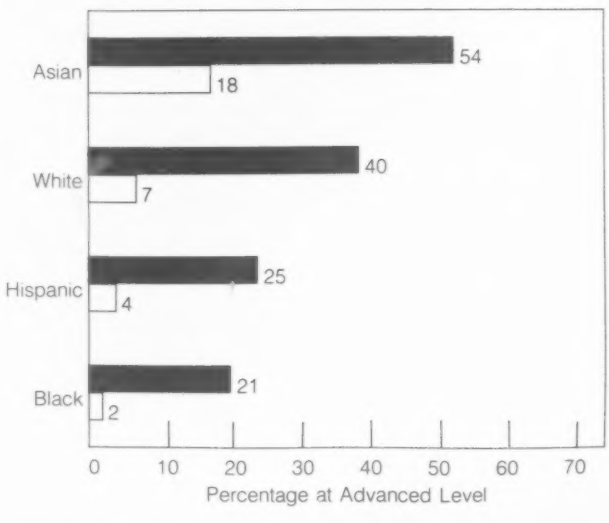
Millions of minority families are locked into inner-city environments that offer no escape.

It is difficult to imagine a more exciting or optimistic conclusion. Nevertheless, millions of minority children and their parents are unable to enter the middle class, because they are locked into inner-city environments that offer no escape and scant possibility of improving conditions where they are. At the moment, there is no evidence of a truly permanent "underclass" in America, but give us two more generations of systematic neglect of inner-city youth, and there will be. By then, education's leaky roof will be beyond repair. Once again, schools cannot do the job in a social vacuum. Until job opportunities, health care, housing, transportation, and personal security improve in the inner cities, it is impossible to ask schools to get better. Trying to teach sick or hungry children is an exercise in futility.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

According to a study released by the Census Bureau in March 1990, American young people are at far greater risk for social, economic, and health problems than are children in the world's other developed nations. American children were the most vulnerable in most of the

FIGURE 2.
Percentage of Eighth-Graders in Low- and High-SES Groups Who Are Proficient in Advanced Mathematics, by Race



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *Profile of the American Eighth-Grader* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1990).

dimensions covered in the study, particularly in the following areas:

- number of children affected by divorce,
- youth homicide rate,
- number (and percentage) of youngsters living in poverty,
- infant mortality rate, and
- teenage pregnancy rate.

From a different source, in 1988 America ranked 22nd in infant mortality, with a rate of 10 deaths per 1,000 live births. Young males in the U.S. are five times as likely to be murdered as are their counterparts in other nations. Twenty-three percent of America's youths live in poverty, and the younger the children, the higher the poverty rate.

As I mentioned above, 15 million children in this country are being reared by single parents, mostly as a result of divorce. Finally, though it might seem unlikely that any other nation could compete with our figure of 4.3 million children being reared by a mother who never married and 371,000 children being reared by a never-married father, the facts are otherwise. Although 23% of America's children are born out of wedlock today, the rate for Sweden is 48% and for Denmark, 40%. However, in Sweden and Denmark, infant mortality is low, and child hunger and poverty are virtually nonexistent.

Children can be at risk on a variety of factors, some of which reflect a social or educational problem: single-parent home (22% of eighth-graders), low-income family (21% of eighth-graders' families below the 1988 figure of $15,000), held back one or more grades (19% of eighth-graders), home alone three or more hours a day (14%), parents with a low level of education (11%), and limited English proficiency (2%).

Some children are at risk because of medical factors: fetal alcohol syndrome, no medical care in the first trimester of a mother's pregnancy, a drug-addicted mother, poor maternal nutrition during pregnancy, a mother who smoked during pregnancy, exposure to lead during pregnancy or in infancy, premature birth, low birthweight, having a "teenage mother," and being a victim of child abuse or neglect.

Some children are at risk because of a problem that develops in adolescence: teen pregnancy, criminal conviction, suicide attempts, and alcohol and/or drug abuse.

Indeed, many children are at risk on more than one of these factors.

Like the Reagan Administration before it, the Bush Administration has made a major point of saying that Americans overspend on education. "Throwing money at problems will not make them go away" became the recurrent litany of these Presidents and their advisors. However, the data they cite to show that Americans spend more than other industrialized nations on education include figures for *higher education*, on which we spend a prodigious amount. (The U.S. has 5% of the world's elementary and secondary students and 25% of the world's higher education students.)

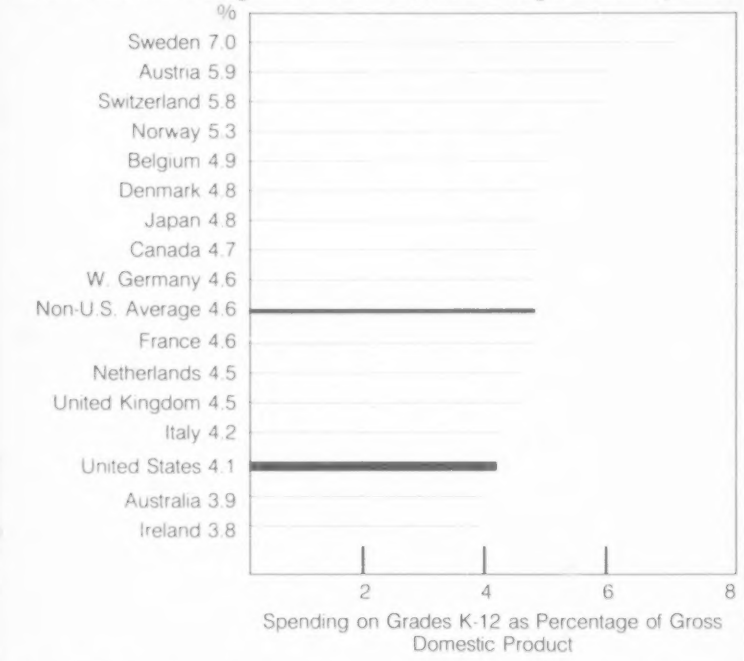
On the other hand, if we compare the percent of its gross domestic product that America spends on K-12 education with similar expenditures in other nations, the results are spectacularly different (see Figure 3). Even with the difficulties of establishing "levels of effort" for different nations, it is clear that many nations invest a larger share of their wealth in their children's education than we do. In addition, the discrepancies in per-pupil expenditures *within* the U.S. are unmatched by any nation with a centralized education system. In many states in the U.S., the amount spent on *some* children is three or four times the amount spent on other children in the same state. Recent court decisions in Kentucky and Texas indicate that this is an area of future concern.

This range of effort and expenditure devoted to children and youths is most characteristic of our nation. In terms of infant mortality and care, one can go from some of the best infant care in the world to some of the worst merely by taking the short drive from Scarsdale to Harlem.

These are a few of the reasons for my earlier assertion that America's "bottom third" of young people is more likely to fail than the "bottom third" of any nation with which we usually compare ourselves. If our goal is to ensure that every young person can graduate from high school with a high level of knowledge and skills, then we must concentrate a large measure of our fiscal and human resources on the children most likely to fail. At present, we concentrate our resources on those *least likely* to fail – children from relatively stable suburban families headed by parents who have high levels of education and income. The national education goals give us not a single clue as to how this reallocation of resources should be brought about. Just how do we fix the roof?

"If they've been 'throwing money' at the schools over the years, they've certainly been missing this place."

FIGURE 3.
International Comparison of Education Expenditures, 1985



Source: M. Edith Rasell and Lawrence Mishel, *Shortchanging Education* (Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute, 1990), p. 5.

EDUCATION – THE BEST WEAPON AGAINST POVERTY AND CRIME

Think for a moment about two young families with children. In one of the families, one or both of the parents has a high school diploma. In the other family, neither parent does. Which family is more likely to live below the poverty line? A good generalization is that increased levels of education will reduce the chances of living in poverty better than anything else. This is widely accepted.

But let's look at a different relationship. Let's look at the relationship between education and crime. Although it is not written about much, the relationship is quite strong. Today, more than 80% of America's one million prisoners are high school dropouts. Each prisoner costs taxpayers upwards of $20,000 a year. Moreover, the investment in prisoners is a bad one, in that 63% of released inmates are back in jail for serious crimes within three years. Taxpayers spend more by far on a prisoner than on *any other kind* of tax-supported individual. A college student is supported by about $3,300 of tax money – a very profitable investment indeed. Every dollar spent on a Head Start child will save taxpayers $7 in later services that the child will not need – a superb investment. Indeed, in Pennsylvania it is seven times more expensive for taxpayers to maintain someone in the *state pen* than it is to maintain someone at Penn State!

This correlation between being a high school dropout and becoming a prisoner is similar to the correlation between being a smoker and getting lung cancer. When you think about the public furor concerning the latter and the widespread ignorance concerning the former, you must wonder about America's youth policy. Table 3 shows the states with the highest and lowest high school dropout rates.* It is interesting to note that, with one exception, the states with the lowest dropout rates also have the lowest rates of prisoners per 100,000 people. With two exceptions, the states with the lowest graduation rates have the highest rates of prisoners per 100,000 people.

JAIL CONSTRUCTION VERSUS CRIME REDUCTION

America's prison population *doubled* in less than a decade, reaching 1.1 million prisoners in 1990. (The U.S. incarcera-

*While dropout rates are notoriously unreliable as absolute numbers, *comparing* rates obtained from the same source – numbers with a "commonly held bias" – is a valuable exercise. Something very different is happening in Minnesota, with its 9% dropout rate, than in Florida, with its 41% rate.

TABLE 3.
High School Dropout Rates, 1987

State (Lowest)	%	State (Highest)	%
1. Minnesota	9.4	1. Florida	41.4
2. Wyoming	10.7	2. Louisiana	39.9
3. North Dakota	11.6	3. Michigan	37.6
4. Nebraska	13.3	4. Georgia	37.5
5. Montana	13.8	5. New York	37.1
6. Iowa	13.8	6. Arizona	35.6
7. Wisconsin	15.6	7. Mississippi	35.2
8. Ohio	17.2	8. Texas	34.9
9. Kansas	17.9	9. California	33.9
10. Utah	19.4	10. Alaska	33.3
11. Connecticut	19.5	11. South Carolina	33.1
12. South Dakota	20.3	12. Kentucky	32.6

Source: *State Education Performance Chart* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Planning, Budget, and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Education, May 1989).

America's children are truly an "endangered species." And educators alone cannot "fix" the problems of education.

tion rate in 1991 was the highest in the world, ahead of the Soviet Union and South Africa. In fact, in 1988 a black male in the U.S. was about five times as likely to be in prison as a black male in South Africa.) Given the increase in drug-related crime and the get-tough policies now in vogue, it is very likely that the number of inmates in U.S. prisons could reach two million before the decade is over. The cost of our prisons is increasing faster than that of *any other* social service, including education and health. Yet the return on the investment is extraordinarily low.

Many governors have discovered that, in order to show that they are "tough on crime," they can build a lot of jail cells and get reelected. Jails can also be built fairly quickly, which shows that the governor is a decisive leader. But there is one major problem with a campaign of building more jail cells: it doesn't reduce the crime rate. No sensible criminal is likely to stop committing crimes because more jail cells are available! (Criminals are not stupid.) There is, however, one thing that does reduce crime rates, and that is increased levels of education.

Let's return to our high school dropout family. With no high school diploma in the household, the best a family can usually manage is a minimum-wage job at $3.30 an hour. That adds up to about $9,000 a year for a full-time worker. Is that enough for our young family even to think about buying a house? Owning a car? Putting children through college? Clearly not. For young high school dropouts working minimum-wage jobs, there is little chance that the American Dream will become reality – unless, of course, they turn to crime. In 1989, four million Americans worked full-time but were still eligible for poverty benefits! Since Ben Franklin, America's deal with its citizens has been: if you work hard, you shouldn't be poor. Where is the reward for the work ethic for these four million people?

However, we know that as educational levels increase, so do earnings. And as earnings increase, the propensity for crime decreases. If you can make your way in the mainstream, a risky criminal "career" becomes less and less inviting. What we need to do is to work on America's crime rates, and the best policy for doing so is to make sure that *every* American child graduates from high school. Already, some school districts – e.g., Greeley, Colorado; and Springfield, Missouri – have developed strategic plans to achieve the goal of zero dropouts by 1995. To do so is to achieve a reduction in crime also, but that result won't show up for many years. Unfortunately, political pressures force elected officials to look for quick-fix solutions like jail construction rather than long-term solutions like ensuring that every young person graduates from high school.

I hope that readers take away from this article two main points. First, for the reasons I specified above, America's children are truly an "endangered species." And second, educators alone cannot "fix" the problems of education, because dealing with the root causes of poverty must involve health-care, housing, transportation, job-training, and social welfare bureaucracies.

We are left with two high-priority questions: What can educators do that they are not already doing to reduce the number of children "at risk" in America and to get them achieving well in school settings? And how can educators collaborate more closely with other service providers so that we all work together toward the urgent goal of providing services to the same client? These two questions must be answered by the nation before our schools will improve.

But we do *know* that it is possible to "fix education's leaky roof." With regard to the problems of children in America, President Bush has said, "We have more will than wallet." I think he has it backward. We have the resources to reduce the proportion of at-risk children to less than 5%. What we lack is the will to do it. K

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The 23rd Annual GALLUP POLL

Of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

by Stanley M. Elam, Lowell C. Rose, and Alec M. Gallup

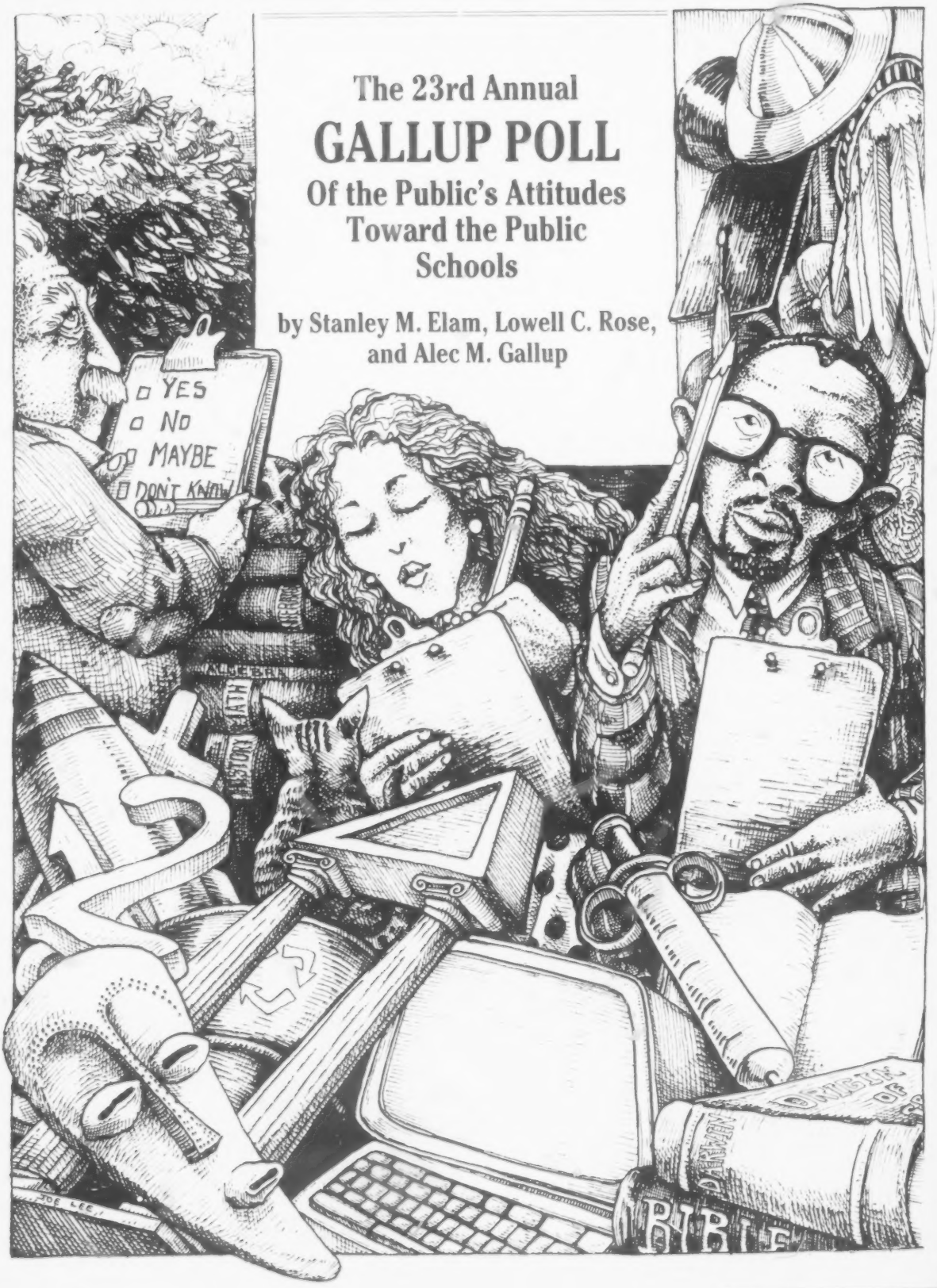

Illustration by Joe Lee

THE STRATEGY announced by the Bush Administration last spring for achieving six national goals for education by the year 2000 receives strong public support in the 23rd annual Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools — even stronger than the goals themselves received in last year's poll. Americans remain highly doubtful, however, that the six goals, first announced in February 1990, can be attained by the target date. In addition, most of the specific measures for public school improvement endorsed by the Bush Administration receive strong support from the U.S. public.

There are at least 10 elements in the strategy for school improvement outlined by Bush and his new education secretary, Lamar Alexander. The first is parental choice of the school a child will attend, a proposal intended primarily to introduce more accountability and competition into what is considered a stultified and complacent monopoly. Accountability would also be promoted by a "voluntary" national system of achievement testing and by a national report card to provide clear and comparable information to the public on how schools, school districts, states, and the nation are progressing. To promote more effective teaching, teachers would receive extra pay for proven merit, for teaching "core" subjects (English, math, science, history, and geography), for teaching in dangerous or challenging settings, and for serving as mentors for new teachers. The school day and year would be extended, with attendance optional and parents paying the extra cost. Greater flexibility for schools would be encouraged; this means, presumably, that various forms of restructuring and shifting of responsibility would be rewarded. Other features of the strategy: the creation of 535 "New American Schools," one in each congressional district and two additional ones per state, each with as few restrictions as possible; the establishment of "America 2000 Communities," not yet defined; the setting of job-related skill standards; and the founding of "skill centers" in communities and workplaces.

Here is how the public views some of these reform ideas:

- People favor (by 62% to 33%) allowing students and parents to choose which public schools in their community the students attend, regardless of where they live. But few people with children in the public schools say that their children would change schools if given such a choice.
- People favor paying extra for particularly effective teaching (69% in favor, 24% opposed), for teaching in hazardous or challenging situations (63% in favor, 29% opposed), and for serving as mentors to new teachers (49% in favor, 39% opposed). But they oppose extra pay for teaching "core" subjects (39% in favor, 53% opposed).
- People overwhelmingly favor requiring the public schools in their communities to conform to national achievement standards and goals (81% in favor, 12% opposed). They also approve of requiring public schools in their communities to use a standardized national curriculum (68% in favor, 24% opposed). And they approve of requiring public schools in their communities to use standardized national tests to measure academic achievement (77% in favor, 17% opposed). More specifically, people approve of tests in English, math, science, history, and geography (88% in favor, 8% opposed); in problem-solving skills (84% in favor, 10% opposed); and in writing a clear composition or paper on some topic (85% in favor, 10% opposed).
- On the question of extending the school day and year, there is less agreement. However, for the first time since the question was initially asked in 1982, a majority of respondents (51%) favor extending the school year, while 42% oppose the idea. Only 46% would lengthen the school day by an hour, while 48% oppose the idea. A sizable majority oppose the idea of making the longer school day or year optional, with parents who choose the option paying the extra cost; the vote was 36% in favor, 56% opposed.
- The first of the six national goals for education announced in February 1990 by President Bush and the nation's governors was that, by the year 2000, all American children will start school ready to learn. Not only did poll respondents give this goal a high priority, but they also endorsed preschool programs at public expense for parents who want them. Fifty-five percent favor such programs; 40% oppose them.

IN THE PAGES that follow, the findings on other questions related to the Administration's education agenda are presented, along with more details concerning the findings above and responses to questions on a number of other topics. The 1991 poll is the most comprehensive survey of American attitudes on education to be conducted in the series, which began in 1969. Gallup field interviewers asked a scientifically selected sample of 1,500 U.S. adults a total of 80 questions, twice the usual number.

America's Future Strength

The first question asked this year dealt with three sources of America's strength: education, industry, and the military. Only weeks after a military victory in the Persian Gulf, less than half (4[illegible]%) of poll respondents considered "building the strongest military force in the world" to be very important. By contrast, 89% regarded "developing the best education system in the world" as very important. A smaller majority (59%) regarded "developing the most efficient industrial production system in the world" as very important. In short, Americans recognize that a strong education system is fundamental to national well-being; nothing will work without a well-educated citizenry.*

The question:

In determining America's strength in the future, say 25 years from now, how important do you feel each of the following factors will be — very important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important?

*A Yankelovich Clancy Shulman poll taken in early June for *Time*/CNN found that, if America decided to devote resources equal to those of the Persian Gulf War to domestic purposes, 73% of respondents wanted to spend them on providing American children with the best education of any nation in the world. Health care was second, with 64%; economic competitiveness was third, with 54%.

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	Very Important %	Fairly Important %	Not Too Important %	Not at All Important %	Don't Know %
Developing the best education system in the world	89	9	1	*	1
Developing the most efficient industrial production system in the world	59	32	5	*	4
Building the strongest military force in the world	41	39	15	3	2

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The same question was asked in three previous polls, with these results:

	Very Important		
	1988 %	1984 %	1982 %
Developing the best education system in the world	88	82	84
Developing the most efficient industrial production system in the world	65	70	66
Building the strongest military force in the world	47	45	47

National Goals for Education

Shortly after the President and the nation's governors announced their six national goals for education in February 1990, interviewers for the 22nd Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa poll asked Americans three questions about the goals: What priority would you assign to each goal? How likely is it that each goal will be reached by the year 2000? Would you tend to vote for political candidates who support the goals? The public strongly supported each goal but expressed profound skepticism about attaining them. There was at least modest support for the idea of voting for political candidates who favor the goals.

The first two of these questions were asked again in 1991. The public gave even higher priorities to each goal, but public skepticism about reaching them was as high as last year. Once again, the highest priority was assigned to the sixth goal: making sure that, by the year 2000, every school is free of drugs and violence and offers a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

Support for the national education goals is consistent across every segment of the population: men and women; whites, nonwhites, Hispanics, and blacks; all age groups; Republicans, Democrats, and independents; all levels of education, from grade school dropouts through college graduates; people in all regions of the U.S. and in communities of various sizes; people in all major occupation groups; people at all income levels; and people with or without children in either public or private schools. Pessimism about the chances of reaching the goals was also consistent among the various demographic groups.

The first question:

This card describes several national education goals that have been recommended for attainment by the year 2000. First, would you read over the descriptions of the different goals on the card. Now, as I read off each goal by letter, would you tell me how high a priority you feel that goal should be given during the coming decade — very high, high, low, or very low?

A. By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn [i.e., in good health, having been read to and otherwise prepared by parents, etc.].

B. By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90% [from the current rate of 74%].

C. By the year 2000, American students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography. In addition, every school in America will insure that all students learn to use their minds, in order to prepare them for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in a modern economy.

D. By the year 2000, American students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.

E. By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the skills necessary to compete in a global economy and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

F. By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

Priority Assigned Each Goal

	Very High %		High %		Low %		Very Low %		Don't Know %	
Goal	1991	1990	1991	1990	1991	1990	1991	1990	1991	1990
A	52	44	38	44	6	6	1	2	3	4
B	54	45	37	42	5	8	1	1	3	4
C	55	46	35	42	6	7	1	2	3	3
D	43	34	41	42	11	16	2	3	3	5
E	50	45	36	37	9	11	2	3	3	4
F	63	55	23	26	6	9	5	6	3	4

"Tex, our new marketing research executive, comes to us from the Gallup poll."

The second question:

As I read off each goal by letter again, would you tell me whether you think reaching that goal by the year 2000 is very likely, likely, unlikely, or very unlikely?

Likelihood of Goal Attainment

	Very Likely %		Likely %		Unlikely %		Very Unlikely %		Don't Know %	
Goal	1991	1990	1991	1990	1991	1990	1991	1990	1991	1990
A	10	12	37	38	33	33	14	12	6	5
B	6	10	36	35	39	37	14	12	5	6
C	6	9	36	38	36	36	15	12	7	5
D	4	6	22	23	45	41	23	24	6	6
E	6	7	25	25	41	42	23	21	5	5
F	4	5	14	14	38	40	39	36	5	5

A National Report Card

Americans want to know what progress is being made toward attaining the national goals for education. By a margin of better than 3-1, they favor preparation and publication of "public school report cards" for individual schools, for each school district, for each state, and for the nation. Again, every category of respondent supports the idea of report cards on the schools, but parents of public school children are particularly enthusiastic.

The question:

It has been proposed that public school report cards be prepared and made public to show what progress is being made toward achievement of the national education goals. Would you favor or oppose such report cards?

	For Local Schools %	For Local District %	For the State %	For the Nation %
Favor	73	76	75	75
Oppose	22	19	19	19
Don't know	5	5	6	6

Accountability Measures

People appear to have more faith in the motivational force of the carrot than the stick. Generally, Americans believe that schools showing progress toward attainment of the national goals for education within a reasonable time should be financially rewarded, but they oppose withholding funds from less successful schools. Instead, they would fire the principals and teachers!

The questions:

If a public school in this community does not show progress toward the national goals within a reasonable time, would you favor or oppose withholding state or federal education funds from that school?

If a public school in this community does show progress toward the national goals within a reasonable time, would you favor or oppose awarding more state and federal education funds to that school?

If a public school in this community does not show progress toward the national goals within a reasonable time, would you favor or oppose not renewing the contracts of the principal and the teachers in that school?

	General Public			Public School Parents		
	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
If unsuccessful, withhold state and federal funds	33	57	10	29	61	10
If successful, award more state and federal funds	64	26	10	64	27	9
If unsuccessful, do not renew principal/teacher contracts	57	32	11	55	34	11

Longer School Day and Year

U.S. public school students spend considerably less time in school than do students in several other developed countries. In Japan, for example, most students attend school 240 days a year, which is about 60 more days or 33% longer, on average, than is the case in the U.S. But Americans have opposed lengthening the school day and year in previous Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa polls

In the 1982 poll, people were first asked these questions: "In some nations, students attend school as many as 240 days a year as compared to about 180 in the U.S. How do you feel about extending the public school year in this community by 30 days, making the school year about 210 days or 10 months long? How do you feel about extending the school day in the public schools in this community by one hour?" Respondents opposed both ideas by sizable margins — 53% opposed to, 37% in favor of lengthening the school year; 58% opposed to, 37% in favor of a longer day. Opposition was somewhat less strong when the question was asked again in 1983 and in 1984.

"Can't you just take me without the exit poll?"

This year we found that, for the first time, a majority of Americans (51%) favor a school year of 210 days or 10 months. Opposition to a longer school day declined marginally: 48% oppose the longer day, while 46% favor it.

The longer school year is particularly favored by college graduates (62% in favor, 33% opposed), by professionals and businesspeople (60% in favor, 37% opposed), and by people in the western region of the U.S. (59% in favor, 36% opposed).

The questions:

In some nations, students attend school as many as 240 days a year as compared to about 180 days in the U.S. How do you feel about extending the public school year in this community by 30 days, making the school year about 210 days or 10 months long? Do you favor or oppose this idea?

How do you feel about extending the school *day* in the public schools of this community by one hour? Do you favor or oppose this idea?

	Extend School Year 30 Days				Extend School Day One Hour			
	1991 %	1984 %	1983 %	1982 %	1991 %	1984 %	1983 %	1982 %
Favor	51	44	40	37	46	42	41	37
Oppose	42	50	49	53	48	52	48	53
Don't know	7	6	11	10	6	6	11	10

In view of the recommendations in America 2000, a question was added this year to sample public opinion on the idea of making a longer school day or year optional, with parents who choose the option paying tuition to cover the extra cost. This idea was unpopular among virtually all population groups.

The question:

It has been suggested that public schools make it optional for students to attend a longer school day or longer school year. Parents of students who choose this option would pay tuition to cover the extra cost. Are you in favor of or opposed to this suggestion?

	National Totals		
	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
Longer school day or year optional, with parents who choose it paying extra cost	36	56	8

Publicly Supported Preschools

The first of the national goals announced by President Bush and the nation's governors calls for all children to start school ready to learn. Most educators believe that tax-supported preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds would advance this goal significantly. A question in the current poll shows that the public tends to agree, although not all groups embrace the idea. Some 55% favor tax-supported preschool for children whose parents want it, while 40% oppose the idea.

Congress passed a law in 1971 (vetoed by President Nixon) that would have provided day care for millions of young children. A Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa poll in 1976 showed that public support for a measure that would provide child-care centers as part of the public school system was by no means universal in that era. Although nonwhites favored it (76% to 15%) and persons between the ages of 18 and 29 approved it (64% to 32%), overall support was only 46%, while opposition came from 49%. Five years later, the poll asked if parents of 3- to 5-year-olds participating in preschool programs operated by the public schools should pay for them. An overwhelming 83% said yes, and only 10% said no.

While *preschool programs* and *day care* are not necessarily synonymous, the findings reported above suggest that there has been a considerable change in public opinion on this issue since 1976. Majorities in all but a few major demographic groups now favor tax-supported preschools. Support is particularly strong among young adults, nonwhites, and persons with children in school. People over age 50 and people who are not in the labor force are less favorably disposed toward tax-supported preschool programs.

The question:

It has been proposed that the public schools make preschool programs available to 3- and 4-year-olds whose parents wish such programs. These programs would be supported by taxes. Would you favor or oppose such programs?

	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
NATIONAL TOTALS	**55**	**40**	**5**
Selected Demographic Groups*			
Race			
White	53	42	5
Nonwhite	70	26	4
Hispanic**	62	32	6
Black	72	26	2
Age			
18 - 29 years	70	27	3
30 - 49 years	56	40	4
50 and over	45	48	7
50 - 64 years	50	44	6
65 and over	39	53	8
Politics			
Republican	49	45	6
Democrat	59	37	4
Independent	56	38	6
Occupation			
Professional and business	60	38	2
Clerical/sales	58	40	2
Manual labor	58	37	5
Nonlabor force	47	45	8
Religion			
Protestant	52	44	4
Catholic	56	38	6
Parents of children under 18			
One child	65	32	3
Two children	60	36	4
Three or more children	65	32	3

*The full Gallup Organization report of this poll provides breakdowns of responses from 13 major demographic categories and 59 subgroups. Major categories not included in this table are education level, occupation of chief wage earner, sex, region of the country, income, community size, and children in school (none in school, public school parents, and nonpublic school parents).

**"Hispanic" includes all races with Hispanic connections.

National Curriculum, Standards, and Tests

If the public will governs, the following developments are inevitable in America: a national curriculum, national standards of achievement in five subjects and in thinking and writing skills; national tests to determine whether the national standards are being met; report cards for individual schools, school districts, states, and the nation; and an accountability strategy that includes firing teachers and administrators in failing school systems.

Public opinion on local, state, and national report cards and on accountability strategies was presented earlier. Findings on seven questions related to a national curriculum with its accompanying standards and tests are reported below. The first three of these questions have been asked in earlier polls. The last four were asked for the first time this year.

The first question:

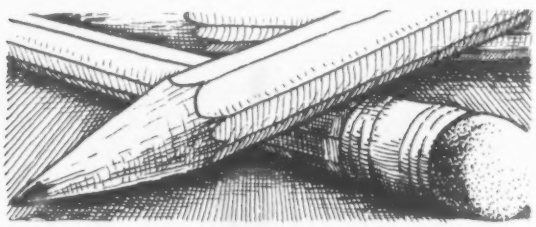
Would you favor or oppose requiring the public schools in this community to use a standardized national curriculum?

Favor %		Oppose %		Don't Know %	
1991	1989	1991	1989	1991	1989
68	69	24	21	8	10

The second question:

Would you favor or oppose requiring the public schools in this community to conform to national achievement standards and goals?

Favor %		Oppose %		Don't Know %	
1991	1989	1991	1989	1991	1989
81	70	12	19	7	11



The third question:

Would you favor or oppose requiring the public schools in this community to use standardized national tests to measure the academic achievement of students?

Favor %		Oppose %		Don't Know %	
1991	1989	1991	1989	1991	1989
77	77	17	14	6	9

Respondents who answered "oppose" or "don't know" to the preceding question this year were also asked:

What if these standardized national tests were made optional for all public schools, so that the policy-making authorities in each district could decide whether or not to give the tests? Would you favor or oppose making these tests optional?

Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
57	20	23

The fourth question:

Would you favor or oppose requiring the public schools in this community to use standardized testing programs to measure students' achievement in the following areas:

A. knowledge in five core subjects: English, math, science, history, and geography?
B. problem-solving skills?
C. ability to write a clear composition or paper on some topic?

Area	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
Core subjects	88	8	4
Problem-solving skills	84	10	6
Ability to write	85	10	5

The fifth question:

If standardized national tests were given to students in this community, how do you think they would score on these tests — above average, below average, or about average?

Above Average %	Below Average %	About Average %	Don't Know %
17	25	51	7

The sixth question:

Now, let's assume that national achievement standards and goals for a student's advancement to the next grade are adopted by the public schools of this community. Which one of these approaches do you think would be better for a student who fails to meet the standards: require the student to repeat the grade with remedial help, or promote the student to the next grade with remedial help?

Repeat Grade %	Promote %	Don't Know %
58	32	10

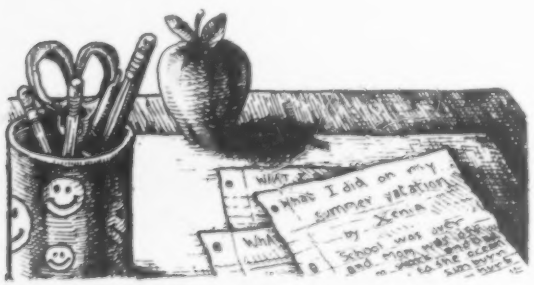
The seventh question:

When do you think remedial help should be provided — during the regular school day or outside the school day, such as after school, on Saturdays, and during summer breaks?

During School Day %	Outside School Day %	Both (Volunteered) %	Don't Know %
52	41	2	5

Opinion on these seven questions was fairly uniform among all demographic groups, but some differences are worth pondering:

- Sixty-one percent of parents who reported that their oldest child was above average academically favored a national curriculum. Even more parents (77%) who reported that their oldest child was average or below average favored it.
- Blacks were less enthusiastic about standardized national tests to measure academic achievement than the population as a whole (69% versus 77%).
- People in the East were more favorable toward national tests than those in other sections of the country (East, 84%; Midwest, 73%; South, 75%; West, 74%).



Vouchers, Choice, and The Public/Private School Issue

Several states are already experimenting with parental choice of the schools children attend, but the choice is generally limited to public schools. President Bush has said that he would like parental choice programs to include all schools that serve the public and are accountable to public authority, regardless of who runs them. Several questions in this year's poll were framed to see how this somewhat ambiguous position fares in the arena of public opinion.

As poll findings over the years show, school vouchers have never been particularly popular in this country. This year, however, support rose by six percentage points over 1987, when the question was last asked. Today, 50% of the public say they approve of vouchers, while 39% oppose them. These percentages are virtually the same as those reported for the year 1983, when the question was asked shortly after publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the government report that aroused widespread concern about the quality of the public schools.

The question:

In some nations, the government allots a certain amount of money for each child's education. The parents can then send the child to any public, parochial, or private school they choose. This is called the "voucher system." Would you like to see such an idea adopted in this country?

	National Totals							
	1991 %	1987 %	1986 %	1985 %	1983 %	1981 %	1971 %	1970 %
Favor	50	44	46	45	51	43	38	43
Oppose	39	41	41	40	38	41	44	46
Don't know	11	15	13	15	11	16	18	11

The voucher plan finds its strongest support among nonwhites and blacks (57% in both groups), inner-city dwellers (57%), people with children under 18 (58%), and nonpublic school parents (66%).

Opinion on parental choice has been explored in Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa polls since 1985. In 1989, when President Bush and the Department of Education backed experimentation with parental choice plans, respondents were asked whether they favored or opposed allowing students and their parents to choose the public schools the students attend, regardless of where they live. The same question has been asked each year since then, with results that are remarkably uniform. In 1991, support for school choice approaches a 2-1 majority in virtually every major population segment, including parents of public school children.

The question:

Do you favor or oppose allowing students and their parents to choose which public schools in this community the students attend, regardless of where they live?

"I get 30% of my news from newspapers, 15% from television, 5% from magazines, and the rest is the result of an overfanciful streak of paranoia."

Illustrations by Joe Lee

	Favor		Oppose		Don't Know	
	1991 %	1990 %	1991 %	1990 %	1991 %	1990 %
NATIONAL TOTALS	**62**	**62**	**33**	**31**	**5**	**7**
Sex						
Men	61	61	35	34	4	5
Women	62	63	32	29	6	8
Race						
White	60	60	35	34	5	6
Nonwhite	69	72	25	18	6	10
Age						
18 - 29 years	71	72	26	23	3	5
30 - 49 years	66	63	30	31	4	6
50 and over	50	54	42	38	8	8
Community Size						
1 million and over	62	64	32	27	6	9
500,000 - 999,999	60	61	37	36	3	3
50,000 - 499,999	68	60	27	33	5	7
2,500 - 49,999	62	61	34	36	4	3
Under 2,500	57	60	38	33	5	7
Education						
College	61	62	35	33	4	5
Graduate	60	62	36	30	4	8
Incomplete	61	63	35	34	4	3
High school	64	65	31	28	5	7
Graduate	63	66	32	28	5	6
Incomplete	65	62	31	29	4	9
Income						
$40,000 and over	60	59	37	37	3	4
$30,000 - $39,999	64	62	32	32	4	6
$20,000 - $29,999	61	67	35	27	4	6
$10,000 - $19,999	63	60	30	30	7	10
Under $10,000	59	60	33	31	8	9
Region						
East	61	62	32	27	7	11
Midwest	58	57	39	38	3	5
South	63	66	32	28	5	6
West	62	62	30	34	8	4

This year President Bush has edged toward endorsement of some form of voucher system. He believes that choice programs should include "all schools that serve the public and are accountable to public authority, regardless of who runs them." This implies that so-called private schools — and perhaps parochial schools — should be an option for all parents, presumably at taxpayer expense. Therefore, a new question put the issue directly: "Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?" Public opposition was overwhelming. More than two-thirds of the respondents to this question (68%) opposed the idea, and only 26% favored it, with 6% expressing no opinion.

Gallup interviewers then asked the 26% who favored the idea this follow-up question: "Do you think private schools that accept government tuition payments for these students should be accountable to public school authorities or not?" The tally was 63% in favor of public accountability for private schools that accept government tuition payments, 27% opposed, and 10% expressing no opinion. Thus even people who would tolerate government tuition payments to "private" schools believe that those schools should — in some manner as yet undefined — be held accountable to public school authorities for the use of the money.

If parental choice ever becomes a reality in more than a few experimental situations in America, parents will face new problems. What qualities and characteristics should they look for in their child's school? Do they have enough information to make wise choices? If not, will they find it difficult to get that information? The results of several questions bearing on these problems follow.

The first question:

This card lists different factors that might be considered in choosing a public school for a child, assuming free choice of public schools were allowed in this community. As I read off each of these factors, would you tell me whether you consider it very important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important in choosing a local school?

	National Totals				
	Very Important %	Fairly Important %	Not Too Important %	Not at All Important %	Don't Know %
Quality of the teaching staff	85	11	2	*	2
Maintenance of student discipline	76	20	2	*	2
Curriculum (i.e., the courses offered)	74	21	3	*	2
Size of classes	57	31	9	1	2
Grades or test scores of the student body	46	42	7	1	4
Track record of graduates in high school, in college, or on the job	45	39	12	1	3
Size of the school (number of students)	36	36	22	4	2
Proximity to home	29	45	20	3	3
Extracurricular activities, such as band/orchestra, theater, clubs	19	49	24	5	3
Social and economic background of the student body	22	32	35	8	3
Athletic program	16	37	34	11	2
Racial or ethnic composition of the student body	14	18	46	19	3

*Less than one-half of 1%.

In choosing a school, people say they would look first at the quality of the teaching staff, at the maintenance of discipline, at the curriculum offered, at the size of classes, at test scores, and at the track record of graduates. Interestingly, athletic programs and other extracurricular activities are not particularly important considerations.

Although "racial or ethnic composition of the student body"

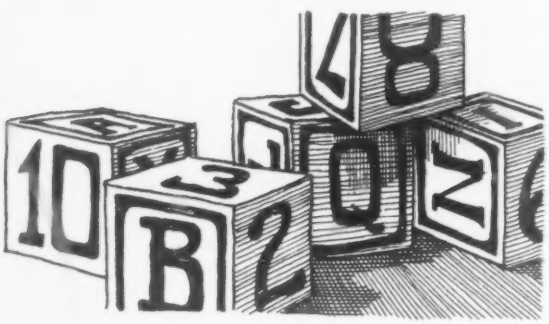
is at the bottom of the above list, nearly one-third of the public (32%) regards this as a very or fairly important consideration. In 1990 about half of poll respondents (48%) stated that racial and ethnic considerations were very important or fairly important in selecting a school.

When this question was asked in 1990, some students of the poll wondered what respondents had in mind when they said that racial and ethnic composition would be an important factor in their choice of schools. To find out, this year several follow-up questions were asked of those who felt that the issue was important. One asked about the ideal percentage of whites to have in a school, one was an open-ended question about *why* racial and ethnic composition is important, one asked whether it is very important or fairly important that there not be too many members of racial and ethnic minorities in a school, and one asked whether it is very important or fairly important that there not be too few members of these groups.

The findings are revealing. Only 3% of whites, for example, say that the schools should ideally be 100% white, and an identical percentage of nonwhites say that schools should enroll no whites at all. However, in reply to the open-ended "why" question, the most common response (made by about one-third of respondents) was "it is important to have a balanced racial mix." Only a few respondents gave answers that revealed racial prejudice.

On a final question, only 9% of whites say there are too many minority students in the schools, and 13% say there are too few. Blacks, on the other hand, are somewhat less satisfied with the status quo. Thirty percent of blacks say there are too few minority students in the schools, 15% say too many, and 29% say about the right number.

To find out how many parents would choose a school for their children different from the one they now attend, parents with children in the public schools were asked directly whether or not they would choose to change their children's schools.



The question:

If you could choose your children's schools among many of the public schools in this community, would you choose the ones they now attend or different ones?

	National Totals %
Would choose same as now	68
Different ones	23
Don't know	9

To determine whether parents would be well enough informed to make wise decisions in choosing a school, parents with children in school were asked how much they knew about the advantages and disadvantages of the schools in their community, whether they felt they had enough information to make a wise choice for their children, and, if *not*, how difficult they felt it would be to obtain this information.

Almost a third (31%) said that they knew little or nothing at all about the schools, and 38% claimed that they did not have enough information to make a wise choice. Of the latter group, almost half thought this kind of information would be "very difficult" or "fairly difficult" to obtain.

The first question:

How much would you say you know about the advantages and disadvantages of the different public schools in this community — a great deal, a fair amount, very little, or nothing at all?

	National Totals %
A great deal	19
A fair amount	43
Very little	29
Nothing at all	4
No response	5

The second question:

Suppose you could choose any school in this school district. Do you feel you have enough information about the different public schools in this community to make the best choice for a child, or not?

	National Totals %
Yes, know enough	51
No, don't know enough	39
Don't know	10

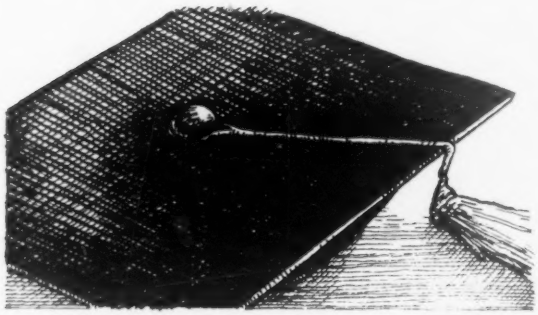
The third question (asked of those who felt they did not have enough information to make the best choice):

How difficult do you think it would be to obtain this kind of information — very difficult, fairly difficult, not too difficult, or not difficult at all?

	National Totals %
Very difficult	8
Fairly difficult	36
Not too difficult	42
Not difficult at all	7
Don't know	7

The above responses of parents hint at some of the problems that might arise if parents were allowed to choose the schools their children attend. For example, it is clear that many people are not sure they have — or even could easily get — the kind of information about schools that would make good choices possible.

Illustrations by Joe Lee



Driver's Licenses and Dropping Out

The second national goal for the year 2000 embraced by the Bush Administration and the nation's governors calls for a dramatic reduction in school dropout rates, so that by the end of the century 90% of all young Americans will be graduating from high school. This goal was considered "very important" by 54% of respondents to this year's poll, although few mentioned dropouts as a major problem in their local public schools.

As every educator knows, there is no single answer to the dropout problem, just as students have no single reason for dropping out. A good strategy will employ many different tactics. One tactic that has caught the attention of legislators in several states is to deny driver's licenses to high school dropouts. As of February 1990, nine states had some form of license suspension for this purpose, including Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Maine, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Twenty-five more states were considering legislation for the same purpose. Florida even suspends the licenses of students who have failing grades, and Florida's Dade County had suspended 10,000 licenses only six months into the program.

The general public favors driver's license suspension for dropouts by about a 2-1 margin: 62% in favor, 32% opposed. Support is fairly consistent across population groups; however, three groups that tend to overlap registered milder enthusiasm: blacks, adults who did not complete high school, and persons with incomes under $10,000.

The question:

As a way of keeping students in high school, one state has passed a law that takes away driver's licenses from school dropouts under age 18. Would you favor or oppose such a law in this state?

	National Totals %
Favor	62
Oppose	32
Already have such a law (volunteered)	1
Don't know	5

Children of low-income or ethnic minority parents are more likely than others to drop out of school. Asked to rate eight measures often suggested to help prevent such children from dropping out, poll respondents endorsed all of them, but they particularly favored firmer discipline, remedial classes and services, and preschool programs.

The question:

This card lists some suggestions that have been made for helping low-income and racial or ethnic minority students in school. As I read off each suggestion, one at a time, would you tell me whether you consider it an excellent, good, only fair, or poor way to help low-income and minority students?

Suggestions	Excellent %	Good %	Only Fair %	Poor %	Don't Know %
Firmer discipline	58	27	8	4	3
Special remedial classes and services	52	35	7	2	4
Preschool programs	49	35	8	4	4
Classwork of greater interest and relevance	44	37	10	4	5
Increased school funding	40	31	15	10	4
The chance to choose from a variety of educational programs at their school	36	44	11	5	4
Decisions on school policy made by parents, pupils, and teachers rather than by school district administrators and the school board	32	35	16	11	6
The chance to choose, with their parents, the local schools they attend	25	38	20	13	4

Teacher Pay, Preparation, and Quality

Because differential pay for teachers is being encouraged by the Bush Administration, current poll respondents were asked to judge four bases for differential pay favored by the Administration. They approved two, gave qualified approval to a third, and turned thumbs down on the fourth.

By an overwhelming margin (69% in favor, 24% opposed) people like the idea of extra pay for teaching "particularly effectively." This is no surprise to anyone who has followed these polls. As early as 1970, respondents to the second Gallup education poll were asked whether each teacher should be paid on the basis of the "quality of work" or on a "standard scale." Fifty-eight percent of the respondents chose "quality of work," only 36% chose "standard scale," and 6% were undecided. When the same question was asked in 1983, a slightly larger percentage (61%) chose "quality of work." In that same year, people were also asked whether, because of a shortage of teachers in science, math, and technical/vocational subjects, teachers in those areas should be paid extra. Fifty percent said yes, 35% no. In 1984, 65% of poll respondents favored and 22% opposed the idea of merit pay for teachers. In 1988, 84% of poll respondents favored "an increased pay scale for those teachers who have proved themselves particularly capable." Only 11% opposed it.

In the current poll, 63% of the respondents also approve of extra pay for teaching in "dangerous school environments," the equivalent of battle pay in the military. About half (49%) approve of extra pay for teachers serving as mentors for new teachers, but 39% oppose the idea, and a large 12% didn't respond, perhaps because the concept of mentors is not widely understood.

The Administration-backed policy of providing extra pay for teachers of the "core" subjects — English, math, science, history, and geography — proved unpopular: 53% opposed the idea; 39% favored it.

The question:

Do you favor or oppose extra pay for teaching particularly effectively; for teaching the basic "core" subjects — English, math, science, history, and geography; for teaching in dangerous school environments; and for serving as mentors for new teachers?

	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
For teaching particularly effectively	69	24	7
For teaching in dangerous environments	63	29	8
For serving as mentors for new teachers	49	39	12
For teaching the core subjects	39	53	8

A 1984 Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa poll showed that the general public rates the value of teachers' services to society just below those of the clergy and medical doctors and ahead of school principals, judges, lawyers, business executives, and bankers. The belief that teachers are underpaid is probably tied to this judgment. In six of these polls people have been asked if they think teacher salaries in their communities are too high, too low, or just about right. In every case, those who said too low outnumbered those who said too high by a wide margin. The widest divergence occurred in 1990, when 5% said that teacher pay was too high, 50% said that it was too low, and 31% said that it was about right.

This year the salary question was put in a new form, but the results are similar.

The question:

Would you favor or oppose raising teacher salaries in the public schools of this community at this time?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor raising salaries now	54	51	59	56
Oppose raising salaries now	32	33	30	34
Don't know or no opinion	14	16	11	10

This year several new questions related to teaching ability were asked. The findings show that the public tends to believe that teaching talent is "inborn" rather than the result of "training" but that education courses are very useful (53%) or fairly useful (35%). At the same time, a minority of people would be willing to hire as teachers (particularly for high schools) talented college graduates who are subject-matter specialists, even if they have had no courses in how to teach. But they would prefer that these specialists demonstrate teaching talent.

The first question:

In your opinion, is the ability to teach or instruct students more the result of natural talent or more the result of college training about how to teach?

	National Totals %
Natural talent	40
College training	25
Both (volunteered)	32
Don't know	3

The second question:

In your opinion, how useful are education courses in training people how to teach or instruct students — very useful, fairly useful, not too useful, or not at all useful?

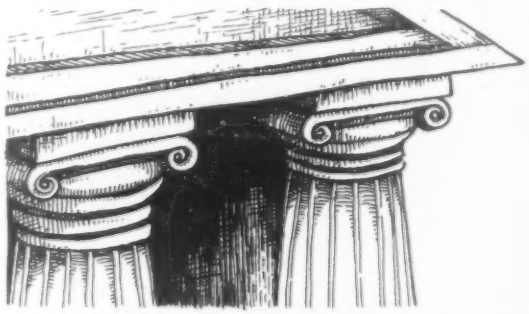
	Very Useful %	Fairly Useful %	Not Too Useful %	Not at All Useful %	Don't Know %
Education courses	53	35	6	1	5

The third question:

Assume that the people on this list have a college degree, received good grades in college, and wish to teach but have taken no courses in how to teach. Which of these people, if any, would you hire to teach in elementary school? Which would you hire to teach in high school?

	Elementary School %	High School %
People with a high degree of expertise or knowledge in a particular academic subject	26	36
"Experts" in certain nonacademic areas, such as business, industry, or technology	16	37
Persons with a high degree of expertise in a particular academic subject who also demonstrate a talent for teaching or instruction	77	68
Don't know	11	9

(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple answers.)



Control of Schools

Many leaders of school reform are convinced that constructive change in the system will come only when local teachers and principals — and sometimes parents as well — have the freedom to make and implement policy decisions heretofore reserved for school boards and top administrators. Site-based

Illustrations by Joe Lee

management has become one of the foundation stones of the so-called restructuring movement.

The general public seems to share this view. In the current poll, 76% of the respondents favor giving principals and teachers more say in how their local schools are run; 14% oppose the idea. Moreover, the public favors giving policy-making power to councils composed of local principals and teachers, as has been done in Chicago, rather than leaving it with boards and top administrators. On this question the vote is even more lopsided: 79% in favor to 11% opposed.

This distrust of boards and central offices showed up in last year's poll. The public believes that parents should have more say in several policy areas, including the allocation of school funds, the curriculum, selection and hiring of administrators and teachers, teacher and administrator salaries, and selection of textbooks, instructional materials, and books placed in school libraries.

The first question:

In most school districts the school superintendent and school board have more to say about how the local public schools are run than the principals and teachers. Would you favor or oppose giving the principals and teachers more say about how the public schools in this community are run?

	National Totals %
Favor more say for principals and teachers	76
Oppose more say for principals and teachers	14
No opinion	10

The second question:

In most school districts, policy decisions and changes are made by the school board and its administrative staff. In a few districts, however, some of these decisions are made by councils composed of local public school teachers, principals, and parents. Which way would you prefer to have policy decisions made in the schools in this community — by the school board and its administrative staff or by a council of teachers, principals, and parents?

	National Totals %
Decisions by council of teachers, etc.	79
Decisions by school board, etc.	11
No opinion	10

School Finance

There are now 10 states in which the state's highest court has found the school finance system unconstitutional because of great disparities among school districts in per-pupil expenditures for education. (Most state constitutions "guarantee" equal educational opportunity for children.) The 10 offending states are, in chronological order of rulings, California (1971), New Jersey (1973 and 1991), Connecticut (1977), Washington (1978), Wyoming (1980), West Virginia (1982), Arkansas (1983), Kentucky (1989), Montana (1989), and Texas (1989). In another 14 states (including four — Idaho, Michigan, Oklahoma, and Oregon — in which challenged systems have been upheld in prior years), the school finance system is currently under court challenge. The other 10 states facing such challenges are Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Rhode Island, and Tennessee.*

As long ago as 1974 the Education Commission of the States (ECS) proposed an equal opportunity amendment to the U.S. Constitution, to do for the nation what the celebrated *Serrano* decision was expected to do for California, i.e., equalize per-pupil expenditures among school districts. In that same year the Gallup education poll found that the public favored such an amendment to the U.S. Constitution by a 3-1 margin. Nothing came of the ECS proposal.

The current poll reveals continued strong public support for more equality in per-pupil expenditures for education and for more court action to equalize expenditures.

The first question:

Do you think that the amount of money allocated to public education in this state from all sources should or should not be the same for all students, regardless of whether they live in wealthy or poor school districts?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Should be the same	80	78	84	75
Should not be the same	13	14	12	14
Don't know	7	8	4	11

The second question:

Suppose it were determined that certain districts in this state were spending a smaller amount of money per student than other districts. Would you favor or oppose court action to equalize expenditures per student?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	62	61	62	59
Oppose	24	24	26	29
Don't know	14	15	12	12

The support for equal funding expressed in responses to both of these questions came in equal proportions from all demographic groups and all regions of the country.

Consistent with their approval of shifting decision-making authority to the people closest to the children being educated, poll respondents believe that local authorities — not federal agencies — should determine how federal education funds are spent.

The question:

*Finance systems have been upheld in Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, New York, Ohio, and Wisconsin, in addition to Idaho, Michigan, Oklahoma, and Oregon. Source: "Education Finance in the 1990s," Education Commission of the States, November 1990.

When federal agencies appropriate money, they usually require the schools that receive this money to spend it as these agencies direct. Should, or should not, this be changed to give local authorities more say in how the money is to be spent?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Should	72	71	74	65
Should not	16	16	17	28
Don't know	12	13	9	7

Again, there were no significant differences among demographic groups on this question of local control. For example, 71% of Republicans support it, as do 74% of Democrats.

Tight Budgets, Tough Choices

Nearly every state in the union faced recession-related budgetary problems this year, and teachers were furloughed by the thousands in those states where the pinch was the greatest. People appear to have very definite opinions about strategies for dealing with budget deficits. Their responses to questions offering possibilities both for saving money and for raising money are remarkably discriminating.

Educators should be reassured by the strong opposition (78%) to reductions in teaching staff. Administrators should ponder the strong support (73%) for reductions of administrative staff.*

Surprisingly, in view of America's well-known resistance to new taxes, the public as a whole favors (55% to 40%) a 1% state sales tax dedicated specifically to financing schools. By a smaller margin (50% to 44%), the public also approves of a state income tax of one-half of 1%, earmarked for the same purpose. Public school parents in particular favor these measures, but support is fairly consistent across population groups.

The first question:

As you are probably aware, many states are having severe budgetary problems. If it becomes necessary to reduce spending for education in this state, would you favor or oppose the following measures in the public schools of this community?

	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
Elimination of all extracurricular activities	32	62	6
A freeze on all salaries	47	46	7
Reduction in the number of teachers	15	78	7
Reduction in the number of administrators	73	19	8
Reduction in the number of support staff members (e.g., janitors, secretaries, nurses, and counselors)	47	45	8
Increases in class size	21	72	7
Elimination of certain courses	54	34	12

The second question:

Now, to raise money for education in this state, would you favor or oppose the following measures in the public schools of this community?

	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
Charging user fees for all extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, music groups, drama, special interest clubs)	49	44	7
A 1% state sales tax dedicated specifically to the public schools	55	40	5
A one-half of 1% state income tax dedicated to the public schools	50	44	6
Establishment of local education foundations to attract financial support from private companies and individuals	74	17	9

Illustration by Joe Lee

*In "Editor's Notes" for May 1991, Henry Muller, managing editor of *Time* magazine, quoted former Labor Secretary William Brock as saying, "There are more school administrators in New York State alone than in all 12 countries of the European Community. And the E.C. has a population of 320 million, vs. 18 million in the Empire State." Muller added that "only 38-41 cents out of every dollar actually gets to the classroom. The rest is eaten up along the way." Muller did not give a source for these obviously suspect figures or explain them further.

Knowledge of, Interest in, and Connections with the Schools

The final series of questions in the survey pertained to the American public's knowledge of, interest in, and connections with the local schools. The 1991 findings show some increase in levels of knowledge, interest, and participation since previous surveys. More significant for educators, however, is the fact that the more people know about their schools, the more likely they are to support and defend them. Correspondingly, the more interest people have in the schools and the more they participate in school-related activities, the more likely they are to support and defend the schools.

The first question:

How much do you know about the local public schools — quite a lot, some, or very little?

	National Totals		
	1991 %	1983 %	1969 %
Quite a lot	22	22	18
Some	47	42	40
Very little	30	29	42
Don't know	1	7	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The second question:

How much interest do you have in what is going on in the local public schools — quite a lot, some, very little, or none at all?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Quite a lot	38	27	63	51
Some	38	40	33	31
Very little	17	23	3	14
None at all	7	9	1	4
Don't know	*	1	*	*

*Less than one half of 1%

The third question:

Since September, which of the following, if any, have you yourself done?

	National Totals 1991 %	1983 %
Attended a local public school athletic event	30	25
Attended a school play or concert in any local public school	30	24
Met with any teachers or administrators in the local public schools about your own child	27	21
Attended any meeting dealing with the local public schools	16	10
Attended a PTA meeting	14	14
Attended a school board meeting	7	8
Written a letter to the school board, newspaper, or any organization about the local public schools	6	4
None of the above	49	43
Don't know	2	4

(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple answers.)

Grading the Public Schools

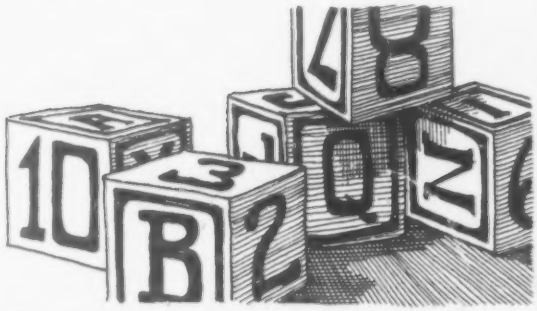
This year poll respondents were asked to assign seven sets of grades, which are summarized in the tables below.

The first question:

Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and FAIL to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the *public* schools themselves, in this community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

Ratings Given the Local Public Schools

	1991 %	1990 %	1989 %	1988 %	1987 %	1986 %	1985 %	1984 %	1983 %	1982 %	1981 %
A & B	42	41	43	40	43	41	43	42	31	37	36
A	10	8	8	9	12	11	9	10	6	8	9
B	32	33	35	31	31	30	34	32	25	29	27
C	33	34	33	34	30	28	30	35	32	33	34
D	10	12	11	10	9	11	10	11	13	14	13
FAIL	5	5	4	4	4	5	4	4	7	5	7
Don't know	10	8	9	12	14	15	13	8	17	11	10



The preceding table shows that the public's ratings of its local public schools have remained basically stable since 1984. This followed a low point in 1983, when the poll was conducted shortly after the appearance of *A Nation at Risk*.

Other grades assigned by poll respondents this year are summarized in the table below.

	Grades Assigned A&B %	A %	B %	C %	D %	F %	Don't Know %
By National Sample							
Public schools nationally	21	2	19	47	13	5	14
Public schools in this community	42	10	32	33	10	5	10
Public school teachers in this community	53	16	37	27	6	3	11
Public school principals and other administrators in this community	43	13	30	28	11	5	13
Public *elementary* school teachers in this community	57	19	38	22	5	2	14
Public elementary school principals and other administrators in this community	47	15	32	25	8	3	17
Public *high school* teachers in this community	40	10	30	28	9	4	19
High school principals and other administrators in this community	37	10	27	26	11	5	21
The school board in this community	30	8	22	30	12	8	20
Parents of students in the local schools for bringing up their children	30	5	25	37	16	7	10
By Public School Parents Only							
The school your oldest child attends	73	29	44	21	2	4	*
Teachers in the school your oldest child attends	72	31	41	21	4	2	1
Principals/administrators in the school your oldest child attends	61	29	32	24	6	4	5

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The most striking aspects of the tables above are: 1) the disparity between the grades people give their local schools (42% A or B) and the grades they give the nation's schools (21% A or B) and 2) the enormous confidence expressed by parents in the schools their oldest children attend (73% A or B) and in the teachers in those schools (72% A or B). The most plausible explanation for these disparities is that the more *firsthand knowledge* one has about the public schools, the more favorable one's perception of them. In short, familiarity with the public schools breeds respect.

Dissatisfied Groups

At least two population groups in America are highly critical of the public schools and favor radical changes in them. This finding derives from an analysis of the responses of the 59 subgroups for which the Gallup Organization provided data this year.

The two most disaffected groups are blacks and inner-city dwellers. Obviously, these groups overlap considerably; even so, they make up a sizable fraction of the total poll sample. A third group, persons between the ages of 18 and 29, also differs from the national sample on several crucial questions.

The table below shows how the responses of these groups differ from the national average on 10 questions that provide a measure of disaffection and desire for change.

	National Sample (N = 1,500) %	Blacks (N = 171) %	Inner-City Dwellers (N = 462) %	18- to 29-Year-Olds (N = 289) %
Give high grades (A or B) to local public schools	42	28	27	37
Give A or B grade to local public school teachers	53	40	39	50
Give A or B grade to local school board	30	21	17	28
Believe standardized national tests would show local students below average	25	39	40	28
Favor preschool programs at public expense	55	72	61	70
Favor a voucher system	50	57	57	60
Favor parental choice of any public school	62	70	70	71
Favor choice of private school at public expense	26	41	33	28

Biggest Problems Facing Local Public Schools in 1991

For the first time, drug use, lack of discipline, and lack of school funding are virtually tied as the most frequently mentioned problem with which the local public schools must deal. This reflects a combination of a precipitous drop in the percentage mentioning drug use (from a high point of 38% in 1990 to 22% this year) and an increase in the percentage mentioning lack of proper financial support. The latter response rose from 13% in 1990 to 19% in 1991.

	Percent Mentioning the Problem									
	1991	1990	1989	1988	1987	1986	1985	1984	1983	1982
Use of drugs	22	38	34	32	30	28	18	18	18	20*
Lack of proper discipline	20	19	19	19	22	24	25	27	25	27

*Ranked third, below lack of proper financial support (22%).

The drug problem was mentioned most often by nonwhites (29%). People with no children in school, who make up two-thirds of the survey sample, mentioned drugs as a public school problem more frequently (24%) than did public school parents (17%).

It seems significant that in the following population groups lack of financial support was number one among all the concerns mentioned: persons who have attended college; professionals and businesspeople; and public school parents, particularly those with a college education and those with children who receive above-average grades in school.

The question:

What do you think are the biggest problems with which the public schools in this community must deal?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Use of drugs	22	24	17	13
Lack of discipline	20	20	18	31
Lack of proper financial support	18	15	26	11
Difficulty in getting good teachers	11	11	11	6
Poor curriculum/poor standards	10	11	8	15
Large schools/ overcrowding	9	8	11	7
Parents' lack of interest	7	7	8	10
Pupils' lack of interest/ truancy	5	6	5	*
Integration/busing	5	4	5	10
Low teacher pay	4	5	3	*
Fighting/violence/gangs	3	4	4	1
Lack of family structure	3	3	4	8
Lack of needed teachers	3	3	4	3
Moral standards	3	3	1	5
Lack of dedicated teachers	3	3	2	4
Drinking/alcoholism	2	2	3	*
Dropouts	2	2	3	1
Lack of attention to/understanding of students	2	2	2	3
Teachers' lack of interest	2	2	2	*
Crime/vandalism	2	2	2	2
School not interesting for students	2	1	3	*
Lack of respect for teachers/other students	2	1	3	4
There are no problems	1	1	2	1
Miscellaneous	21	21	27	32
Don't know	8	10	5	10

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Illustrations by Joe Lee

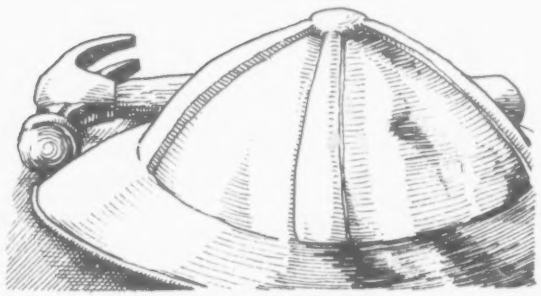
Views on Discipline

The public is thoroughly consistent in its perceptions that 1) students in the public schools of the U.S. lack discipline and 2) improved discipline is the answer to many of the schools' problems.

In the 1991 poll the general public ranked discipline second among the biggest problems with which public schools in their communities must deal, gave a disciplined environment (free of drugs and violence) the number-one ranking among the six national goals, ranked maintenance of student discipline second among factors important to parents in choosing a public school for their child, and rated firmer discipline first among suggestions for helping low-income and racial or ethnic minority students succeed in school.

These perceptions clash with the opinions of teachers, who usually perceive discipline problems to be much less serious than parents' lack of interest and support, lack of proper financial support, and pupils' lack of interest and truancy as major problems.* Either the public has been misled, or the teachers are mistaken. Wherever the truth lies, this discrepancy in perceptions is a cause for serious concern.

*See Stanley Elam, *The Second Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Survey of Public School Teacher Opinion: Portrait of a Beleaguered Profession* (Bloomington, Ind.: Phi Delta Kappa, 1989), p. 13.



Research Procedure

The Sample. The sample used in this survey embraced a total of 1,500 adults (18 years of age and older). It is described as a modified probability sample of the nation. Personal, in-home interviewing was conducted in all areas of the nation and in all types of communities.

Time of Interviewing. The fieldwork for this study was carried out during the period of 3-17 May 1991.

The Report. In the tables used in this report, "Nonpublic School Parents" includes parents of students who attend parochial schools and parents of students who attend private or independent schools.

Due allowance must be made for statistical variation, especially in the case of findings for groups consisting of relatively few respondents, e.g., nonpublic school parents.

The findings of this report apply only to the U.S. as a whole and not to individual communities. Local surveys, using the same questions, can be conducted to determine how local areas compare with the national norm.

Composition of the Sample

Adults	%
No children in school	68
Public school parents	29*
Nonpublic school parents	5*

*Total exceeds 32% because some parents have children attending more than one kind of school.

Sex	%
Men	48
Women	52
Race	**%**
White	86
Nonwhite	14
Age	**%**
18-29 years	24
30-49 years	39
50 and over	37
Occupation (Chief Wage Earner)	**%**
Business and professional	30
Clerical and sales	6
Manual labor	39
Nonlabor force	17
Occupation (Chief Wage Earner)	**%**
Farm	2
Undesignated	6
Income	**%**
$40,000 and over	30
$30,000-$39,999	16
$20,000-$29,999	16
$10,000-$19,999	21
Under $10,000	11
Undesignated	6
Region	**%**
East	25
Midwest	24
South	31
West	20
Community Size	**%**
1 million and over	37
500,000-999,999	11
50,000-499,999	15
2,500-49,999	10
Under 2,500	27
Education	**%**
College	46
High school	48
Grade school	6

How to Order the Poll

The minimum order for reprints of the published version of the Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa education poll is 25 copies for $10. Additional copies are 25 cents each. This price includes postage for parcel post delivery. Where possible, enclose a check or money order. (If faster delivery is desired, do not include a remittance with your order. You will be billed at the above rates plus any additional cost involved in the method of delivery.) Send orders to Gallup Poll, Phi Delta Kappa, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. Ph. 812/339-1156.

Persons who wish to order the 649-page document that is the basis for this report should write to Sarah Van Allen at the Gallup Organization, 47 Hulfish St., Suite 200, Princeton, NJ 08542 or phone 609/924-9600. The price is $95 per copy, postage included. Besides complete demographic breakdowns of responses to all questions asked this year, that document contains answers to several questions bearing on race and ethnicity.

Acknowledgments

A panel of 15 distinguished educators and others interested in education helped frame the questions used in the 1991 Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa education poll. We wish to acknowledge their generous help.

Panelists were Harmon A. Baldwin, superintendent (retired), Monroe County (Ind.) Community School Corporation and member, MCCSC Board of Education; Robert W. Cole, Vice President, Center for Leadership in School Reform, and former editor of the *Phi Delta Kappan*; Larry Cuban, professor and associate dean, School of Education, Stanford University; H. Dean Evans, superintendent of public instruction, State of Indiana; Mary H. Futrell, past president, National Education Association, and senior fellow and associate director, George Washington University Center for the Study of Education and National Development; Bill Honig, superintendent of public instruction, State of California; Chris Pipho, director, Information Clearinghouse, Education Commission of the States; Carol O'Connell, education consultant and president, Phi Delta Kappa; Mary Anne Raywid, professor of education, Hofstra University; Joseph J. Scherer, executive director, National School Public Relations Association; Jo Seker, director, Concerned Educators Against Forced Unionism; Kenneth A. Sirotnik, professor and chair, Policy, Governance, and Administration, College of Education, University of Washington; Benjamin D. Stickney, director of program development, Board of Cooperative Educational Services, Colorado Springs; Donald R. Stoll, executive director, Educational Press Association of America; and Perry A. Zirkel, University Professor of Education and Law, Lehigh University. — SME

Illustration by Joe Lee